

The Ad Hoc  
Coalition  
To Save Lives  
Through  
Public  
Defibrillation

June 30, 2004

Senator Arlen Specter  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6031

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Ad-hoc Coalition to Save Lives Through Public Access to Defibrillation would like to highlight the importance of three funding requests before your committee. We respectfully request that you fund federal automated external defibrillation (AED) programs and rural EMS training and equipment programs at meaningful levels. It is clear these emergency devices save lives when put in the hands of trained responders through public access to defibrillation (PAD) programs.

Sudden cardiac arrest takes the lives of some 250,000 Americans each year and out of hospital survival rates for sudden cardiac arrest remain at or below an unacceptably low 5 percent nationally. Sudden cardiac arrest is the deadliest of all emergencies and yet our emergency responders and the general public do not always have access to life-saving equipment that can prevent cardiac death. While the direct comparison of defibrillators – classified as a medical device – to fire alarms and smoke detectors, seat belts and air bags is not possible, it is clear that we can and should do more to prevent these untimely deaths just as we do for other emergencies.

During sudden cardiac arrest the heart often quivers erratically and fails to effectively pump blood to the body. Defibrillation is the only known treatment for the condition. If left without treatment, death occurs within ten minutes, leaving a slim window for emergency medical personnel to arrive at the side of a victim – and to save a life they must arrive with this life-saving device. Many victims could be saved if AEDs were more readily available and if cardiopulmonary resuscitation were performed on victims before emergency personnel arrived with the devices.

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Comprehensive PAD programs place AEDs within reach of trained lay responders such as airport and stadium employees, shopping mall security personnel, local fire and police forces and others in locations where these events are likely to occur. Such efforts save lives. Established PAD programs in airports, sports facilities and in other areas have produced survival rates for sudden cardiac arrest victims of 50 percent or more.

Federal legislation and funding commitments are helping to save lives. The Rural Access to Emergency Devices Act has already provided \$25 million to rural areas over the last two years and nearly \$10 million more is soon to reach communities nationwide. A total of over 20,000 defibrillators will be placed in rural communities with these dollars. ***Devices placed through this program have already saved lives that would otherwise have been lost.*** For example, just one defibrillator purchased through this program in Humeston, Iowa has been used four times and saved two lives.

Another federal statute also stands ready to save more lives. The Community Access to Emergency Defibrillation Act was signed into law as part of the *Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Response Act* in June of 2002. This legislation establishes a competitive grant program that is open to any state or local government – rural, urban or suburban. With funds from the Community AED Act, local community groups can work together to design and implement life-saving PAD programs. Such programs – designed to have the greatest impact by giving local community leaders control over AED placement decisions. For fiscal year 2004, an initial \$1 million was appropriated for this new program.

Finally, we would like to call your attention to the Rural EMS Training and Equipment Assistance Program. This program would award competitive grants to several related state agencies and offices to improve emergency medical services in rural areas. The funds would impact all areas of personnel and equipment readiness for EMS programs which are suffering from low state budgets and the strain of proper staff training and high turnover.

Even the most aggressive placement policies will not bring defibrillators to all those in need, but we can make every effort to ensure that this life-saving device is available to as many Americans as possible. By ensuring that the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill includes the highest possible level of funding for these programs you can help save thousands of lives. Thank you for your consideration. Attached are copies of both the House and Senate support letters for these important programs.

Sincerely,

American Heart Association  
Advocates for EMS  
American Ambulance Association

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Association of Black Cardiologists  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
American Red Cross  
American Safety and Health Institute  
Congressional Fire Services Institute  
Emergency Nurses Association  
Healthsafe Solutions, Inc.  
Heart Rhythm Society  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
Lifework, Inc.  
Medtronic, Inc.  
National Center for Early Defibrillation  
National Fire Protection Association  
National Rural Health Association  
National Volunteer Fire Council  
Philips Medical Systems  
Save A Life Foundation  
ZOLL Medical Corporation